

The background of the cover is a large, light-colored seal of the Lutheran Church in America. The seal is circular with a double-line border. Inside the border, the words "LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA" are written in a serif font, following the curve of the circle. In the center of the seal is a large, ornate cross with decorative flourishes at the ends of its arms. Above the cross is a smaller emblem featuring a crown and a cross. At the top of the seal, there is a small triangle containing a circle. Below the cross, the year "1960" is printed.

**DECISION
IN A TIME
OF NATIONAL CRISIS**

1960

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*(Statement of concern and call to mission adopted
October 22, 1968, by the Fourth General Convention
of The American Lutheran Church.)*

DECISION IN A TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS

A. For Such a Time as This

1. America is suffering a national crisis. It is a crisis equal to that of 1776, 1861, or 1933. It is a crisis of growing hate, hostility, frustration, and alienation. The crisis grips urban, suburban, and rural America. No race, class, group, institution, section, or segment of America is untouched. So widespread a national crisis calls for clear analysis, resolute choices, and decisive action.

2. Central in this crisis is a ringing demand for justice and equity in all human relationships. Minorities demand for each person the respect, recognition, freedom, equality, opportunity, and protection due every human being, regardless of his race, religion, national origin, wealth, or any other condition of life. They demand equal justice under law, impartial enforcement of all laws, equality of opportunity, honesty in business dealings, fair prices, just wages, dependable goods and services, and the right to take part in making the decisions that affect them. Lonely voices demand an end to the exploitation, oppression, denial of opportunity, indifference, insensitivity, and the other forms of inhumanity which they see inflicted too often by the strong on the weak. They demand that power be used to effect mercy, equity and opportunity, peace and freedom, righteousness and honor.

3. A growing recognition of the need for social justice explains efforts to promote better housing and education, sufficient and meaningful jobs, more adequate health and welfare services, and improved relations between the police and citizens. Justice and equity also are at stake in "agricultural parity," "community development," "giving hope to the hopeless," "one man-one vote," "full political participation," the "war on poverty," "tax loopholes and incentives." Justice and equity are involved in "white racism" and "black power," in "selective conscientious objection" and "civil disobedience." Such catch-phrases in reality are cries for correction of warped relationships, individual and corporate, which impede the development of justice.

4. Beneath the surface symptoms of the present crisis lies a deep spiritual disarray. Widespread fear, loneliness, emptiness, and insecurity lead to personally and socially destructive behavior. Self-interest and the desire for power exist within and pose dangers in every group and person. Those who have acquired power or prestige and enjoy its fruits are fearful of the loss of their position. Those on the outside seek access to power and its opportunities, rewards, privileges, and responsibilities. When any group pursues its interests to the hurt or disadvantage of the inherent rights of others, the imbalance causes a crisis of warped relationships. Much "groaning in travail" accompanies the resultant struggle for new relationships and new structures, the rule of law and justice, and a more equitable sharing by more groups and persons in the privileges and responsibilities of society.

5. Today's cries for justice and equity echo Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and the other Old Testament prophets. They call for the response of discipleship which Jesus described as love, obedience, and service. They are integral to the witness and work of the Christian community in its deeds of love active for justice. The American Lutheran Church takes seriously such Scriptural imperatives as: Do justice . . . abound in love . . . speak truth . . . bear one another's burdens . . . defend the poor and fatherless . . . relieve the oppressed . . . show no partiality . . . follow after righteousness . . . be doers of the word . . . overcome evil with good . . . pray for one another . . . fear, love, and serve God. Therefore, The American Lutheran Church must heed and respond to the form and content which men's cries for recognition and justice take in this time of national crisis.

B. Call to Urgent Mission

6. In this resolute task of heeding and responding to men's cries in a troubled and suffering world the church must be a decisive participant. Involvement in concerns for justice inheres in its Christ-given mission. Human need *is* an arena of Christ's work. Participation in His work *is* witness. The church's involvement in the struggle for justice, equity, and mercy portrays parables of God's love in action, points to signs of the Kingdom in our midst, evidences the good works by which men are drawn to see the Father, and testifies to its faith by deeds of love active for justice. As the church partici-

pates in the struggle for justice and equity it proclaims with integrity that God is dynamically renewing and transforming all areas of life. As it equips its members for their roles in society it extends its influence into every one of their relationships.

7. To be true to its trust of preaching the good news of the kingdom of God and of exemplifying the style of life in the kingdom of God on earth, The American Lutheran Church must witness to the inseparability of verbal proclamation from serving deeds of love active for justice. Its response is one which moves resources into action. Such a response involves a readiness to experiment and a willingness to take risks. At its every level of organization The ALC needs to evidence its genuine interest in and its honest concern for the whole life of all men, without regard for their wealth, prestige, social standing, race, political affiliation, or nationality. As the church proclaims the message of redemption and release through the words and deeds of its committed and responsive members it becomes the channel for God's transforming power to change hearts, lives, communities, and the nation.

C. Identifying Our Objectives

8. Along with the nation within which it ministers, The American Lutheran Church stands at a time of decision. It must choose resolutely to rededicate itself to its purpose, "the proclamation and propagation of the Christian faith, and the quickening and sanctification of the members of its congregations . . ." (302). It needs renewed emphasis and action on two of the methods to which it is committed: "Study the problems of contemporary life and society in the light of the Word of God, *in order to make its contribution toward solving these problems*" (302.5, emphasis added), and "Develop programs for the promotion of human welfare . . ." (302.6). It claims and proclaims the *whole* Gospel for the *whole* man by the *whole* church to the *whole* world.

9. Toward this end, The American Lutheran Church identifies a number of objectives toward which it must move in responding to the challenge of the national crisis. Through each of these objectives it must seek to influence human lives, to respect the integrity of choices made in the free exercise of human dignity, to manifest the

servant role of the church, and to effect needed changes in public opinion and in the structures of secular society. Thus, we identify our mutual need to:

a. Seek understanding, in the light of the Word, of the meaning of crisis events in the nation so that The American Lutheran Church, hearing God's judgments, can respond more effectively to His invitation to commitment, His call to a renewed national life, and the guidance He would give a people in crisis.

b. Increase our sensitivity and response to the human needs and aspirations of minority and economically-deprived groups and persons, working with them to secure justice, equity, their share in, and their right to contribute to America's abundance, life, culture, and unity amid diversity.

c. Help build the wholesome attitudes essential to just, equitable, and responsive relationships and structures in society, motivating members of The American Lutheran Church to strive for needed changes in American society, which will bring about a greater measure of justice and equity for all persons.

d. Foster understanding of the potentialities of power to effect change, for good or for evil, and encourage the effective use of power to achieve creative and constructive social purposes.

e. Develop and use with telling moral effect various channels for action through which The American Lutheran Church, as a corporate body at each of its levels of organization and as members active in the structures of society, can participate in constructive movements to cope with the national crisis and its attendant evils.

D. Channels for Action

10. Numerous channels are open to The American Lutheran Church for a constructive attack on the crises of urban, suburban, and rural America. As illustrative of the possibilities we propose that The American Lutheran Church should:

a. Intensify efforts to acquaint the unchurched, regardless of their race, nationality, or social standing, with the promises and power of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to welcome into the

participating fellowship of the congregation all who accept His invitation to membership in His church.

b. Increase the level of theological study and understanding, among both pastors and lay persons, of the mission and strategy of the church in an era of rapid and planned social change.

c. Encourage congregations to establish small groups where fellowship and growth in Christian maturity may be nurtured, so as to motivate the members of these congregations for service to their brothers and for service in the structures of society.

d. Undertake an intensive educational effort in The American Lutheran Church to increase understanding of the heritage of minority groups, the dehumanizing nature of racism and poverty, and the relationship of Christian discipleship to justice and equity.

e. Strengthen the supportive services of The American Lutheran Church to its congregations, pastors, agencies, and institutions in the inner city, in dwindling rural communities, and in areas where minority and economically-deprived groups and persons are located.

f. Involve minority group persons in the decision-making processes of The American Lutheran Church, and make greater use of minority group persons in the available employment opportunities at each level of The American Lutheran Church as a corporate body.

g. Help formulate and support sound goals of public policy relating to justice and a responsive society, especially focusing critical attention upon legislative, executive, and judicial efforts in the areas of housing, employment, education, welfare, health, and police and law enforcement practices.

h. Use corporate purchasing power to advance racial and social justice by considering the factor of affirmative action for equal employment opportunity as well as quality, cost, and availability of service in contracting for goods, services, and construction.

i. Expand financial and staff support to programs of community action and other cooperative ventures seeking justice and equity, where their aims, objectives, methods, and techniques are deemed

by responsible boards, institutions, and units of the church to be compatible with those of The American Lutheran Church.

j. Provide information on effective current programs and projects, and propose specific innovative or experimental programs which can be considered and adopted by groups within The American Lutheran Church, and assist, as resources permit, in the development of such programs and projects.

k. Expand educational opportunities, especially for the recruitment of church workers, through such means as (1) increased scholarships and remedial education programs for minority persons previous to entering and in their studies at the colleges and theological seminaries of The American Lutheran Church and (2) provision for specialized in-service training for those who serve the church in ghettos, poverty areas, and other situations of injustice and inequity.

l. Use investment funds of The American Lutheran Church, its congregations, and institutions, in such enterprises and activities as will benefit minority or economically-deprived peoples, to such degree and in such manner as those who bear legal responsibility for these funds may determine.

m. Place priorities on uses of funds which maximize programs and services to people and minimize investment in physical plant and facilities.

n. Cooperate, where possible and in accord with Lutheran theology, with churches and members of all Christian communions in renewal, witness, and service.

E. Christ for Crises: Hope for All Seasons

11. In its own decision-making in a time of national crisis The American Lutheran Church has the fortunate opportunity to combine preparations for the celebration of its Tenth Anniversary with a continuation and expansion of Project Summer Hope. The Church Council already has approved a church-wide anniversary theme and emphasis on "Christ for Crises," reaching a crescendo on Pentecost Sunday, 1970, in accord with recommendations of the Commission on Evangelism for that anniversary celebration. This theme and emphasis at the same time can build upon, advance, and expand the

dimensions of "Project Summer Hope." This timely project served to deepen and strengthen throughout The American Lutheran Church the foundations of faith, hope, and love, these three with their obedience, commitment, and readiness to sensitive service. Therefore, we, the delegates to this Fourth General Convention, call for the combining of preparations for a Tenth Anniversary celebration and rededication with an enlargement and extension of Project Summer Hope into a church-wide coordinated focus on CHRIST FOR CRISES: HOPE FOR ALL SEASONS.

12. We, the delegates to this Fourth General Convention, expect that the objectives we have identified in paragraph 9 and the channels for action we have proposed in paragraph 10 will be suitably incorporated into the focus on CHRIST FOR CRISES: HOPE FOR ALL SEASONS. We expect that all units and personnel at the national offices, and all districts, congregations, institutions, and agencies, will incorporate into their total work and witness an appropriate expression of our requested focus on CHRIST FOR CRISES: HOPE FOR ALL SEASONS.

13. Each district is requested to develop its own focus on CHRIST FOR CRISES: HOPE FOR ALL SEASONS, through which the objectives and channels for action adopted by this Convention can become operative in that district. We look to each district president and executive committee for leadership in this direction.

14. Each parish (or neighboring parishes and congregations in joint action) is requested to take effective steps for implementing in its own area the objectives and measures of CHRIST FOR CRISES: HOPE FOR ALL SEASONS. Materials and ideas supplied by national and district offices should prove helpful but need not bind or limit local efforts to fulfill the purposes to which every member congregation of The American Lutheran Church is bound in mutual commitment.

F. Openness and Creativity in Response to Crises

15. In a related action this Convention is called upon to structure and to delegate authority for crisis action. It is beyond the competence of this Convention, however, to prescribe the specifics where-

by the several levels and units of The American Lutheran Church can respond to its requested focus on CHRIST FOR CRISES: HOPE FOR ALL SEASONS. It expects each to relate faithfully, openly, and creatively as its special opportunities and responsibilities permit. Faithful stewardship of the Means of Grace, and discipleship in deed and in truth, permit no retreat from the crises of the world into the cloisters of ecclesiasticism. A committed people, turned to God in worship, prayer, and fellowship, must become a responsive people, their hearts open to the cries of a troubled and suffering world, their heads and hands working to make love active for justice and equity in all the structures of society.

16. The current national crisis contains great dangers to, yet also many opportunities for, the future of American society. Discerning choices must be made and wise actions planned in this time of decision. In its own hour of decision, The American Lutheran Church sees the national crisis as infusing its mission with a new dimension of heightened significance. It now commits itself to a renewed dedication and a strengthened obedience, as a servant of Jesus Christ, invoking the Holy Spirit to give it wisdom, power, and perseverance for its task.



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